



European Economic and Social Committee
The President

Brussels, 10.09.2012, the EESC

The EESC Liaison Group Meeting

Staffan Nilsson's opening remarks

Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
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Check Against Delivery

We were all happy when the European Commission designated 2013 as the European Year of Citizens. Citizens play a central role in Europe's future and integration. What could be more appropriate and timely to dedicate a European Year to them?

We all know the focus is on citizens' free movement and all the rights implied by this, which we all agree is one of the most tangible elements of the European citizenship that the citizens can live. There are still obstacles to free movement and maybe this year is a good opportunity to sort them out (Schengen treaty problems, immigrants' rights, consumer rights, labour mobility rights within the EU, consumer rights etc.)



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Without denying this, however, we believe European citizens can do much more for Europe and their communities. This year must also be about active, participatory citizenship, and should encourage informed, active and inclusive citizen participation in the European integration process and in political and social life. We asked in our opinion that this European Year be called: European Year of active and participatory citizenship.

A vote is expected in the European Parliament (22-23 October), also a decision on the budget - the level of funding should be appropriate, fixed and in proportion to the importance of the goal.

However, there is already a lot of brainstorming, planning and coordination work in the EESC. We set up a coordination group which met for the first time last Friday and I understood they had a fruitful brainstorming on the content aspects of the Year and on the inter-institutional cooperation. Andris is here to tell us more about what has been discussed. I'm happy you've touched on the sustainability of the results of the year.

My message is that the Committee engages to undertake and carry out a broad, participatory, transparent and innovative programme that can show society and the EU institutions the value added of participation and co-creation of a programme for citizens with citizens and their organisations. We want to engage in inter-institutional cooperation involving EU level and national level and civil society at large.

I'm glad that our Communication Vice-president and communication team are fully committed to use most of our communication tools, events and activities and dedicate them to the EY2013. Anna Maria is here and she will tell you more about it.

The NGO Alliance for the European Year 2013 has already gathered more than 40 European networks representing more than 3000 organisations at national and local level. This is impressive. And our Liaison Group has been very much



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involved in the alliance' work. I expect the Alliance will be taking the thematic year forward and will frame recommendations. It will have all our support.

The EESC has a key expertise and will give substantial input to the success of the European Year of Citizens.



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